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**Sent:** Thur 11/18/2010 10:49:47 PM  
**Subject:** Fw: Delta Recovery Plan Set for Release Amid Political Backbiting - E&E News PM  
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Delta Recovery Plan Set for Release Amid Political Backbiting

Colin Sullivan, E&E reporter - 11/18/10

Key parties in the long-running war over California's Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta are meeting today in Sacramento in a final rush expected to result in the public release of an extensive recovery plan for the estuary.

Set for release by the Bay Delta Conservation Plan's steering committee is a 50-year recovery plan for the Northern California region that will in all likelihood propose building a pipeline under or around the sprawling estuary, to divert water from the Sacramento River in the north to farms and urban areas in Central and Southern California.

The plan will also propose extensive habitat recovery work for endangered chinook salmon, Central Valley steelhead and delta smelt. All three have been caught up in an on-again, off-again courtroom drama pitting environmentalists and fishermen against farm interests in the Central Valley. The plan is expected to be released later today or in the next few days.

In the run-up to today's meeting, environmental groups and water districts have been alleging that the BDCP process is essentially fixed to guarantee more water for Southern Californians at the expense of fisheries in the north.

Many have charged farms and water interests in the south with pursuing a water grab meant to coalesce in a multibillion-dollar pipeline or canal project, which is backed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) and would be funded by an \$11 billion water bond, assuming the bond passes in 2012.

A letter sent this week to David Hayes, deputy secretary of the Interior Department and the Obama administration's point man on the delta, accused water contractors in the south of essentially rigging the process via political connections and expensive studies that indicate more diversions would not hurt the fish.

At issue is a fundamental question: whether a new canal or pipeline would further reduce water flows through the delta for species. The state in a draft document released today said the effects of the BDCP for endangered fish would be a net positive, but those opposed beg to differ.

"The science says clearly additional diversions will be deadly for the Delta," wrote Dick Pool, president of Pro-Troll Inc., and Zeke Grader, executive director of Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, in the letter to Hayes. "Water engineers may not understand this, but biologists clearly do, that an estuary -- which the Bay-Delta is, it's not a reservoir -- requires freshwater inflow that then mixes with tidal flow to create the rich brackish water that provides spawning, nursery and residence habitat."

The letter urges a "new direction" in California under Gov.-elect Jerry Brown (D) that would "take control of the BDCP leadership from the water contractors."

"The problem many of us have had with the direction of the BDCP ... is the notion that the same level of diversions or additional levels of Delta diversion would be possible and still restore the Delta and its resources," the letter states. "Such a notion flies in the face of science that has been around for the past two decades and reconfirmed in at least three separate reports during the last year."

Yet the draft document from the BDCP steering committee circulated this morning says the recovery plan -- once it is officially released -- "will reduce the impacts of stressors on the Chinook salmon and Central Valley steelhead" and improve tidal and subtidal habitat conditions.

The document says the massive recovery effort will lead to expansion of intertidal habitat by more than 6,000 acres in the near term, another 11,000 acres in the "early long-term" and then another 14,360 acres in "the late long-term." Subtidal habitat recovery would be increased under the BDCP by more than 7,000 acres in the near term, more than 9,000 in the early long term and an additional 31,000 acres in the late long term.

"The increased access to suitable habitat for foraging and rearing, and the increased availability of prey, are expected to contribute directly to increased growth, juvenile health and survival," the document argues.

As for construction of a canal or pipeline at the north end of the delta, the draft recovery plan says a "state-of-the-art design" would mean negligible risk of entrainment at intake facilities. On the more controversial subject of flows, the draft says operating dual diversion facilities would result in "substantial improvements" in flows at the south end of the delta and a "net improvement" in downstream flows through the delta.

"These improvements in Delta hydrodynamics are expected to result in improvements in habitat conditions for juvenile steelhead and salmon rearing and survival during emigration," the document states.

Click [here](#) to view the draft document, which was still being discussed by the steering committee at press time. Sullivan reported from San Francisco.

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